PIERCE MARKS

Southern New Hampshire University

REUNITING ETHICS AND AESTHETICS: AUGUSTINIAN AND THOMISTIC AESTHETICS AND THE BUCK-PASSING ACCOUNT OF AESTHETIC VALUE

Since the 19th century, many have characterized ancient and medieval aesthetics--especially Christian aesthetics—as falling into one of two extremes: either as too rigidly identifying beauty with a narrow set of particular, objective and often moral properties,[1] or as so general as to reveal nothing about art qua art.[2] The former, rigid reading often serves to create the appearance of great tension between ancient, medieval and contemporary

[1] According to Harris, philosophers of the late 19th-20th c. widely regarded classical theories of aesthetics, particularly Platonic, as "moralistic." By "moralistic," Harris does not seem to mean that there is a fundamental identity or common metaphysical grounds in moral and aesthetic value. Rather, the sort of moralism many found in Plato and others was the view that beauty was only valuable insofar as it was conducive to right action and knowledge. This, needless to say, overlooks the more substantial view that beauty and goodness, though distinct, are somehow metaphysically one, and brands Plato as an aesthetic consequentialist. See Marjorie S. Harris, "Beauty and the Good," *The Philosophical Review* 39 (1930): 479–90. https://doi.org/10.2307/2180097. Wladyslaw, despite writing a very informative paper, wrongly gives the impression that the Christian theological tradition held to a rigid objectivism about beauty, and seems to overlook the subjective elements that I will below show belong to Augustine and Aquinas. Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz. "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (Winter 1972): 170. This leads Wladyslaw to see St. Basil the Great's thoughts on beauty as contrary to Augustine's, on the grounds that the former was willing to recognize a subjective element while the latter was not..Further, Wladyslaw seems to see the classical, Christian aesthetic mindset I will describe below as involving the presumption that a particular, narrow range of quantitative proportions can explain the nature of beauty. He fails, in my view, to appreciate how central the concept of non-quantitative and non-dimensional proportion was to those like Augustine and Aquinas. Op cit. Tatarkiewicz, 167. Wladyslaw even supposes a clean division between proportion and correspondence in mimesis (which, upon reflection, cannot be divided neatly). It is against these caricatures of the "classical" aesthetic mindset that Gurney argued, showing why identifying beauty with any particular, objective properties will always fail. See Edmund Gurney. "Relations of Reason to Beauty," *Mind* 4 (1879): 482–500 (1879). According to Sartwell, Edmund Burke's influence largely consisted in arguing against any analysis of beauty that tries to limit beauty to the realization/instantiation of any particular properties, such as particular kinds of proportion. Crispin Sartwell, "Beauty", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2012.

[2] Related to the latter accusation, Speer suggests that medieval theories of beauty have only a tertiary relevance to modern aesthetics. In one sense, Speer is right; for thinkers like Aquinas and Augustine, the objective aspects of beauty seem to be best conceived of as a natural property; their analyses of beauty are not *only* analyses of the beauty of artworks, but stand totally independent of art. But this clearly does have direct relevance to art, for beautiful artworks are subsumed under an analysis of beauty already provided by contemplating nature, and their normative status parasitic on the normative authority of morality. But Speer actually accuses the Augustinian and Dionysian as being concerned with a merely intellectual, not a bodily, beauty. Speer reads such thinkers as primarily concerned with beauty as a symbol or sign, not as an incarnate, natural property (78-79). The result is that the writings of Sugar are cast as opposed to those like Augustine and Aquinas, as it emphasizes the physical, bodily beauty of his Cathedral. However, this is wrongheaded: the condition of clarity and splendor are bodily concepts, as I show below, and so are the order and configurational concepts in both Augustine and Aquinas. See Speer, Andreas. "Beyond Art and Beauty: In Search of the Object of Philosophical Aesthetics," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8 (2000):1, 73-88.

thought.[3] Some have even naively supposed that the medieval thinkers were uninterested in aesthetics because of the (supposedly) Christian insistence that the material world-the world in which artistic beauty is realized—is evil.[4] To put it mildly, I don't think this is quite right. Such views have led to the core insights and questions of ancient and medieval aesthetics being largely overlooked by modern, theory-constructing philosophers interested in the nature of beauty and aesthetic value. The metaphysical and ethical aspects of aesthetics that interested authors like Augustine and Aquinas have primarily been left to be developed in theological and art-historical literature.

In this essay, I will briefly survey the aesthetic views of two of the greatest medieval thinkers--Augustine and Aquinas. Ultimately, I argue that Augustine and Aquinas have an *incarnational* conception of beauty: beauty, in its most general sense, is *goodness manifested in sensory experience*, or *goodness incarnate* in an object of experience. Then, I will show how their teaching shares much in common with my favored interpretation of moral language and truths (Scanlonian buck-passing). Finally, I will argue that the core aesthetic insights of Augustine and Aquinas, when recast in more contemporary terms, is a defensible and potentially insightful theory of beauty, taken in the sense of aesthetic value in general.

Augustine: Reasonableness as the Grounds of Beauty

For Augustine, beauty is more than what merely appeals to or delights the sensory faculties. Augustine recognizes that certain simple, seemingly formless qualia like the experience of color or a single, simple sound can be pleasurable. However, this is not what Augustine means by "beauty" (Lat. *pulchritudo*). Rather, beauty is the apprehension of "reasonableness" by the mind through the senses.

> For what pertains to the eyes, a reasonable whole made of parts is said to be beautiful. For the ears, we give the name of sweetness to the reasonable harmony of a choral composition… We are then forced to admit that it is reason that delights in the pleasure of the senses, through dimension in the case of the eyes and through modulation in the case of the ears.[5] In short,

[3] Certainly, such tension does exist, but where exactly does it lie? Again, Wladyslaw sees modern subjectivist tendencies as in great tension with the medieval Christian mindset. This, as I will argue, is not so, even if modern and enlightenment authors themselves thought themselves novel in this way. Tatarkiewicz, op. cit., 174.

[4] Chapman gives a concise summary of some of these misunderstandings, and quotes the widely influential Gilbert and Kuhn's *A History of Aesthetics* as saying that "insofar as early Christianity interpreted matter and the body as evil and outside the providence of God, the sensible and material properties of art were not tolerated." See "Some Aspects of St. Augustine's Philosophy of Beauty," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1: (1941): 46–51, https://doi.org/10.2307/426743.

[5] Augustine of Hippo. *On Order [De Ordine*], translated by Silvano Borruso (South Bend IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), Bk. II.33

beauty is reasonableness manifested to an observer in and through sensory experience.

There are six important aspects of this "reasonableness manifested" account. First, "reasonableness" is, roughly, fit between the rational mind and an object. Augustine distinguishes between reasonableness (Lat. *rationabiles*) and reason or rationality (Lat. *rationale*), the latter being a faculty, ability or power, while the former is (or necessarily confers) a positive normative status.[6] The reasonable or rational, in the first sense, is agreement with the rational structure of the mind and goals of rational beings (whether the human mind or the mind of God). To apprehend the reasonableness of/in an object is thus to apprehend a "fit" between the object and the mind. Thus there is a subjective, or mind-dependent aspect of beauty--the object, in order to be experienced as beautiful, must have characteristics that fit the rational aspect of the human mind. However, the ultimate grounds of reasonableness is God Himself, the Divine Mind, not the mind of individual human beings, and thus a pure subjectivism is ruled out. The human mind often needs training to see the reasonableness of, and thus beauty in, creatures; the mind often needs to be conformed to the object, rather than the object being conformed to the mind.[7]

Second, reasonableness is ultimately convertible with the good. The pursuit of right living (i.e., ethics) is a discovery of what is reasonable in purposeful conduct and avoiding rash behavior.[8] Further, as we will see below, what makes an object reasonable are the very properties that also make it good: *measure, the structure of its semblance,* and *order,*[9] or their equivalents, preconditions, and derivatives, such as *unity, measure, proportion, harmony,* and

[6] "Let us not neglect the fact that most learned men debated the difference between "rational" and "reasonable:" it fits into what we have been discussing so far. They used the term "rational" for beings that did or could use reason, and "reasonable" for what is said or done according to reason. We could say that these baths, or our own speech, are reasonable, reserving the term "rational" for those who built the baths and four ourselves who are speaking. Reason, then, has its source in a rational soul, and its completion is things done or said reasonably" Ibid. 31.

[7] The example Augustine gives is of an ape. Many find apes ugly, but they are, in truth, beautiful, though to a lesser degree than a human being. *Pulchritudo*, in the sense Augustine has in mind, is not simply the "beauty" that we apprehend directly and easily as a pleasant experience, but something that we must be trained to pick up on. See Augustine of Hippo "The Nature of the Good." In *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. J.H.S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 330.

[8] "We have surveyed three types of things where the work of reason makes its appearance. The first is things constructed for a purpose, the second for speech, and the last for pleasure. The first is about not acting rashly; the second, about teaching the truth; the last, about contemplation. The first applies to right living, the second and third to the disciplines we are now analyzing." (Op cit. ,*On Order,* Bk. II.35.

[9] "These three things, measure, form and order, not to mention innumerable other things which demonstrably belong to them, are as it were generic good things to be found in all that God has created, whether spirit or body." Op cit., Augustine of Hippo *On the Nature of the Good,* 327.

design. And finally, God is ultimately Rationality and Goodness Itself, so that both must, in some sense, be grounded in His Unity.[10]

Third, as has already been stated, reasonableness can be detected in and through the senses. Fourth, the experience of beauty is the pleasurable or, in Chapman's words, "joyous" detection of reasonableness, and aesthetic pleasure the pleasure of the mind in that detection.[11] There are three relevant passages in *On Order* in which this is made clear:

> By what we have verified so far, we have detected traces of reason in the senses, especially vision and hearing, but also in pleasure. The other senses can be deemed reasonable not for the pleasure they afford, but for something else: a purpose… We don't call reasonable a striking color to be found in beautiful things, nor do we call reasonable a vibrant sound obtained from plucking a musical string, which produces a clear and pure tone.[12] It is the senses that perceive motion, but since the soul is united to the body, it is the soul that delights in it. A lovely movement charms the senses, but only the beautiful meaning behind the movement charms the soul…[13]
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> *It is reason that delights in the pleasure of the ear.*

Augustine (like Aquinas) sees aesthetic experience as necessarily carrying pleasure with it. .[14] Pleasure is a response to the detection of the good within the thing. We might say that the positive, sentimental response "tracks" the inherent reasonableness (goodness/value) of the aesthetic object.

Fifth, as the quote above shows, because Augustine primarily identifies the reasonableness of creatures with their compositional aspects (measure, order, unity, harmony, etc.), he is naturally drawn to the conclusion that simple qualities like color and isolated sounds cannot be reasonable, for they have no apparent composition.[15] Rather, these simple qualities can contribute to a beautiful whole, but are not themselves beautiful because they are not themselves rational/reasonable. This implies that there are two kinds of distinct experiences we might categorize as "aesthetic:" simple pleasurable sensations in response to simple sensory stimuli, and an intellectual, spiritual

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[10] Both Augustine and Aquinas take the view that "God is the ultimate exemplar of all created things, and that the form of each individual thing is identified with an idea in God's intellect." See C.S. Sevier, "Thomas Aquinas On the Nature and Experience of Beauty", UC Riverside, 2012, 216. ProQuest ID: Sevier_ucr_0032D_10901.MerrittID:ark:/13030/m5j67ktv.Retrievedfrom https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7d25w3x9

[11] "The proper joy of the aesthetic experience is a joy of the mind in which the intelligence rejoices in the object because of that object's agreement with the intelligence's own nature." See *St. Augustines' Philosophy of Beauty*, 10.

[12] Op cit. Augustine of Hippo, *On Order,* Bk. II.33.

[13] Ibid., Bk. II. 34.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., Bk. II.,33.

delight in response to apprehensions of empirical objects and processes. It seems likely that the former will also often be involved in the latter, as an aesthetic object, or certain of its qualities, may be ordered to produce certain simple sensory pleasures as a component of the overall effect of the object.[16] Still, the experience of beauty is a delight in the object and its reasonable qualities (including its powers to affect us in certain ways and produce sensory pleasures).[17]

Sixth, as in the case of simple qualities like color and sound, Augustine recognizes a division between things that are reasonable in themselves, and things that are reasonable for their use/purpose/contribution/role. This suggests that an experience of beauty is, as we now say, *disinterested*--it is joy in the thing for its own sake, love for the thing itself and its qualities, powers and activities, not only because of its usefulness, including its ability to produce sensory or intellectual pleasure.

Augustine on the Constituents of Beauty

In sum, to apprehend the beauty of beautiful objects is just to apprehend the reasonableness of that object through sense. Since reasonableness is, for Augustine, the grounds of ethics (in that an act is right/wrong because it is *reasonable/unreasonable*), Augustine's account of beauty unifies ethics and aesthetics. The experience of beauty is just a different way of apprehending the morally good (i.e., reasonable) features of objects (in the broadest sense of "morally good," as the generic good or value that all good things share in).

But what properties of objects make them reasonable, and thereby provide the conditions of their beauty? Answering that question in full would take up more space than allowed here, and so I can only give a brief overview. What is most important for our purposes is the general idea behind Auguistine's aesthetic: that beauty is the good known by the mind through the senses.

Chapman summarizes Augustine as positing four conditions of reasonableness, each pertaining to what we might call the "formal" or "configurational" aspect: *number*, *form, order,* and *unity*.[18] However, Chapman explicitly cautions that we should not expect Augustine's terminology to be

[16] Augustine seems to affirm this in his discussion of the windows of a bathhouse: "There is no need to use many words to tell you how three windows, one in the middle and two at the sides, opened at equal intervals, have the effect of lighting the bath, delighting our senses and inducing contemplation to our soul." Ibid., Bk II.,34.

[17] Augustine of Hippo "The Nature of the Good." In *Augustine: Earlier Writings,* ed. J.H.S. Burleigh. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953_, 327. A contemporary defender of Augustine's overall views need not take this same tact; I mention it only for accuracy. For color, though it can manifest in experience as a simple unity, is actually a complex, ordered phenomena. Further, the simple unity of color might be said to reflect God's simplicity and unity, and tso be reasonable and thus beautiful. This commitment of Augustine's is a reason why I suspect some read him as giving a rather narrow account of beauty, as only concerned with compositional proportions, despite his insistence that "innumerable other things (qualities)" fall under the categories of measure, form and order.

[18] *St. Augustine's' Philosophy of Beauty* , op. cit., ch. 2.

perfectly consistent--the content is what matters.[19] For instance, in *On the Nature of the Good,* Augustine lists the following properties as properties of goodness, and thus reasonableness: *modus* (measure), *species* (appearance/semblance), and *ordo* (order).[20] Elsewhere, Augustine cites *proportion, dimension, rhythm,* and *harmony* as reasonable properties.[21] How we divide up the list of Augustinian conditions does not matter. Again, Augustine recognizes that there are innumerable properties that fall under *modus, species* and *ordo*.[22] Rather, the important point is that these conditions are each ways of describing the different aspects of an individual thing's existence as a configured, unified whole, and its functional role in systems greater than itself.

In *On Order*, Augustine argues that what are detected and deemed reasonable in sensation are configurational states--the subsuming and ordering of parts into whole compositions.[23] This applies to artworks and human artifacts, but also to the natural world, being a creation of God. [24] An experience of beauty, and thus reasonableness, is akin to appreciating the impressive *design* elements of an artisan's work, i.e., its formal elements.[25] Things such as

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[19] ""To develop St. Augustine's philosophy of the beautiful, inquiry had to be made into his recurring and interconnected concepts of number, form, unity, and order. These terms were never hardened into meanings which remain fixed throughout his writings, but were more like seminal ideas unfolding into greater amplitude and pushing forward to further consequences. Yet no matter from what direction analysis is pursued, his doctrine of divine illumination is reached. The aesthetic object is an illumination of number, form, unity, and order shining out in beauty." Ibid, xii.

[20] Augustine of Hippo, "The Nature of the Good," in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, op. cit., 327.. Note that, in the critical Lat. edition I am using, "form" is a translation of *species,* which *can* mean form, but can also mean *external appearance*, or form as it contributes to *semblance*. The translation I am using seems to make these three features redundant: measure, form and order are all aspects of a thing's configurational state, or form. But, it may be that Augustine is listing three ways of being good: the internal configuration of the thing (*modus*), the outer semblance (*species*), and the way it is ordered to its proper internal and external ends as a part of a whole (*ordo*). Sevier backs up this reading of *species* as semblance. Sevier, op. cit.

[21] *On Order,* op. cit., Bk. II.34.
[22] *On the Nature of the Good,* op. cit. 327.
[23] "I can see two things within whose domain reason and the senses can possibly come together: visible human works and audible human words. In either domain, the mind makes use of a necessarily bodily double channel of information: the eyes and the ears. And so, on seeing a whole made up of parts that fit well with one another, it is not absurd to affirm that it appears reasonable. Equally, on hearing a well-composed, harmonious melody, we do not hesitate to say that it sounds reasonable." Op cit. *On Order,* Bk. II.32

[24] This is evident from how he speaks of natural objects: "For a stone to be such, all its parts need to coalesce into unity. What is a tree? Would it be a tree without unity? And what about the members, viscera, and all the parts an animal consists of? Once dismembered, an animal ceases to be such. Do not friends seek unity in friendship? The more they attain it, the friendlier they become…" *On Order.* Op. cit., Bk. II., 48.

[25] "From this stage, reason advanced to the province of the eyes. And scanning the earth and the heavens, it realized that nothing pleased it but beauty; and in beauty, design; and in design, dimensions. And in dimensions, number." *On Order,* op. cit., Bk. II.42.

configurations and orderings within a painting, poem, speech, piece of music or biological organisms are themselves reasonable, and pleasure is derived simply from apprehending these reasonable configurations through sensation.

However, it should be kept in mind that the actions of individual beings can also be conceived of in formal terms--the actions of each individual can be coordinated towards the good of the whole. Thus reasonableness is not limited to dimensional structure and proportion, but is a broad concept including our mental and physical activities, as well as entire organic processes. A subject can be reasonable in virtue of its internal properties *and* in virtue of its external relations and actions, and the concept of "reasonableness" is so broad as to include non-dimensional and non-quantitative properties such as the unity of friendship and the organic unity of living organisms.[26] This must of course be the case, or else Augustine would have restricted beauty to extended and material beings. Beauty would be the manifestation of a thing's inherent reasonableness.

This cuts against those who would read Augustine as rigidly identifying beauty with particular formal and extensional properties, such as quantitative proportion and mathematical structure. Augustine does, of course, emphasize the centrality of *proportion* and *unity* to aesthetic success. And, surely, Augustine does think that quantitative proportion and mathematical structure underlie all reality, so that beauty is, in a sense, an apprehension of certain numbers that agree with those numbers favored by the mind.[27] But there is an important difference between proposing that beauty is the realization of a *specific* quantitative proportion (or small set of proportions) and postulating that beauty involves the apprehension of certain proportions that agree with the rational mind. For Augustine there are innumerable ways something can be good or reasonable, and so innumerable "numbers" that are all good and beautiful. Thus, analysis in terms of a small set of quantitative proportions or specific properties would be foolish.

Further, the formal properties that underlie beauty are present in all good things, and thus in every being, since all beings are inherently good. The beauty of any particular object, artwork, or system will not simply consist in its being ordered at the surface level, as if its beauty was a matter of neatly reflecting the same small set of quantitative proportions present in other works of art. Rather, beauty will often be messy, and perhaps even ugly at first sight. Strange beings can certainly be beautiful, for their proportionality is a *moral* and *spiritual* proportionality and unity, not merely a quantitative

[26] "For a stone to be such, all its parts need to coalesce into **unity**. What is a tree? Would it be a tree without unity? And what about the members, viscera, and all the parts an animal consists of? Once dismembered, an animal ceases to be such. Do not friends seek unity in friendship? The more they attain it, the friendlier they become…" (*On Order*, op. cit., Bk. II.48)

[27] See Chapman, op. cit., for more on the Pythagorean influences on Augustine's thinking.

one.[28] Augustine was clearly not proposing that all cases of beauty partake in the same proportions, as if there was a small set of ratios that we can identify as "the beautiful ratios." Any arguments against this "classical" view of beauty must recognize the generality and non-specificity of "proportion" and "order," or else be immediately irrelevant to our discussion.[29]

In fact, such narrow readings would miss Augustine's overall point: beauty is a participation in the reasonable, and all creatures are reasonable in virtue of being themselves, not just those that we ordinarily take as exemplars of surface level "proportionality" or "mathematical harmony."[30] What Augustine is really doing is identifying beauty with goodness, the latter of which is identical to the all interpenetrating God, He who is Himself Order, Rationality, Proportion, Harmony and Unity. Overall, Augustine's view is incarnational: aesthetic experience--the experience of beauty--is the reasonable incarnate in and experienced through objects of sensation, even the lowly creatures the unillumined mind takes for granted. Beauty is the delight in the apprehension of the divine in the creaturely.

Further, when Augustine speaks of beauty (Lat. *pulchritudo*), we should not think he is speaking of that surface level pleasantness many of us associate with the term. Rather, Augustine uses a distinct word for a "prevalence/superiority of form"-- (Lat.) *formosi*--though this is also often

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[28] I encourage my reader to carefully scan the quotations in footnotes and text above. In these, unity and proportion are not merely quantitative concepts, but have to do with moral ordering. Quantitative proportions are, for Augustine, included under what one might call moral proportion, or "reasonableness," and perhaps moral proportion has an irreducible mathematical aspect. Yet, the quantitative and mathematical aspects and kinds of proportion and harmony do not exhaust the idea of proportion in general. As Chapman puts it: "Though emphasizing the importance of number as one of the constitutive elements of the aesthetic object, Augustine did not fall into the error of reducing all the aesthetic constituents to formal numerical relations, the kind of reduction which has tempted those who have tried to find in art geometrical laws, the golden section, etc. Beauty in bodies endowed with life, Augustine shows, is due not only to color supervening on the harmony of parts, but to life itself. The life animating a worm, and moving it with measure, reveals a higher unity, and hence more beauty, even better than the body with its splendor of colors and delicacy of form. Anyone acquainted with St. Augustine's praises of the beauty of a worm, a cock fight, the beauty of man in his body, soul and virtues, the beauty of the universe as a whole and its Creator, would certainly disagree with Gilbert and Kuhn's judgment that, "One feels the absence in him of such delicacy of feeling and closeness to the phenomena of beauty as one finds in Cicero's sudden appreciation of the dignity of his paved portico and colonnade, or in his fastidiousness about the stuccoing of a ceiling."" ("Some Aspects of St. Augustine's Philosophy of Beauty," op. cit., 50.

[29] Wladyslaw gives Robert Grosseteste as an example of this "narrow" and specific thinking. For Grosseteste, aesthetic success or beauty is a realization in a thing of just five quantitative ratios, namely 1:2, 1:3, 1:4, 2:3, and 3:4. (Op cit. Wladyslaw, 169). Again, Gurney's article, though making a very good point against those, like Grosseteste, who would identify beauty with a particular, objective property, simply has no relevance to Augustine or, as we will see, Aquinas. See Gurney, Edmund. "Relations of Reason to Beauty." Mind, Volume os-4, Issue 16: 482–500 (1879).

[30] "Unlike Plotinus, for whom "that which remains completely foreign to all divine reason is absolute ugliness," Augustine held that there could be no absolute ugliness since wherever there was any being there was some beauty." "Some Aspects of St. Augustine's Philosophy of Beauty", op. cit.

translated as "beauty."[31] It is *formosi* that probably is more closely in line with how we today use "beauty" to designate a particular, pleasant aesthetic property, a certain ability to please the senses just in virtue of form, perhaps better called "handsomeness."[32] The pleasure one derives from a beautiful object need not be an easy or cheap pleasure read off and stimulated by the surface of the aesthetic object, but as a result of deep contemplation of challenging subjects, a product of seeing the harmony pervading the cosmos. And so it is a general account of beauty as goodness incarnate or manifested in the senses, that Augustine seems to have in mind, not that particular, pleasant aesthetic property that so many modern aestheticians focus on.[33]

II. Aquinas on Beauty

Almost one thousand years later, Thomas Aquinas expressed the same sort of view as Augustine, though in somewhat different terms. In the *Summa Theologicae,* Thomas gives a tripartite analysis of beauty derived from pseudo-Dionysius:[34] beauty is said to involve "**clarity**" (Lat. *claritas*) in addition to the internal, configurational properties of **integrity/perfection** and **proportion/consonance**.[35] Aquinas asserts that,

Three things are necessary for beauty: first, i**ntegrity or perfection**, for things that are lacking in something are for this reason ugly; also due **proportion or consonance**; and again, clarity, for we call things beautiful when they are brightly colored.[36]

And elsewhere in the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas claims that beauty and goodness are one in reality, though distinct concepts:

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[31] Op. cit. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Nature of the Good,* xviii.

[32] The example of the ape, discussed in a previous footnote, fits in here again. (Ibid., 330.xiv-xv.) The ape is mistaken as ugly by many, when it truly has *pulchritudo*. Still, Augustine does not seem to be denying that, compared to the human form, the ape may be considered "deformed." But this is only a comparison of their forms. The human has "greater beauty" or, we might say, the superior or prevailing form, and such things are readily called *formosi* .Ibid. 331.

[33] As Chapman puts it, "the aesthetic object is an illumination of these formal constituents, which are also expressional, shining out in beauty. The beautiful is a synthesis of the formal aesthetic elements, illumination and expression…" Chapman, op. cit., 49.

[34] Andrey Ivanov, "Thomas Aquinas in Reference to Beauty: The Two Definitions." *Quaestio* 15 (2015): 581–95. doi:10.1484/J.QUAESTIO.5.108632.

[35] Ivanov gives a wonderful chart collecting the clusters of terms Aquinas uses in each of his definitions of beauty. Ibid.

[36] Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologicae* (2017 Online Edition, 2nd ed.), Benzinger Brothers Printers to the Holy Apostolic See (1920) I.39.8c.

> Beauty and goodness in a thing are identical fundamentally; for they are based upon the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty. But they differ logically, for goodness properly relates to the appetite (goodness being what all things desire); and therefore it has the aspect of an end (the appetite being a kind of movement towards a thing). On the other hand, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which please when seen. Hence beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses delight in things duly proportioned, as in what is after their own kind—because even sense is a sort of reason, just as is every cognitive faculty.[37]

Beauty is thus, in some way, identical to the good. I have too little space to cover Aquinas' account of goodness and its relation to beauty, however, and must rely on the work of other writers. Briefly, beauty and goodness are convertible in that they are grounded in the same metaphysical reality: well-proportioned form and activity.[38] The objective constituents of beauty make this plain. 'Integrity" or 'perfection' refer to those properties of an object that make it maximally good and in perfect harmony with the divine, exemplary idea of its species (its activities, its overall form, and the structures of its parts). To achieve perfect integrity is to be, as a whole and in all one's parts and acts, perfectly proportioned. 'Proportion' primarily refers to the structural features in virtue of which a thing might be good, though it is not limited to dimensional qualities.

For Aquinas, the goodness of an object is had in virtue of its configurational or formal state and activities.[39] [40] Beauty will likewise be had in virtue of the

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[37] Ibid., I.5.4.

[38] See Sevier, 249, op. cit. on this point.

[39] A reconstruction of Aquinas' theory of goodness would be paper length itself. Two of the most well-known secondary sources on the topic are: Jan Aertsen, "Thomas Aquinas on the Good: The Relation Between Metaphysics and Ethics", in *Aquinas's Moral Theory: Essays in Honor of Norman Kretzmann* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Being and Goodness", in *Being and Goodness* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.) My favorite work on Aquinas' theory of goodness is actually found embedded within Umberto Eco's book on Aquinas' theory of beauty. There, Eco writes that "the good is not merely what all things desire; it refers to something whose own inner structure possesses the degree of perfection which makes it desirable" Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge MA:Harvard University Press, 1988), 59.

[40] When speaking of activities, I mean what Aquinas means by actuality (Lat. *actualitas*), in contrast to mere potentiality/potency (Lat. *potentia*). Actuality and potentiality are, in turn, translations of Aristotle's Gk. *energia* and *dunamis*. For Aristotle, *dunamis* refers to a potency or power to change, act, or be acted upon. *Energia* is hard to define, and must be grasped by example, and in contrast to *dunamis. Energia* is the active, actual utilization or exercising of *dunamis.* A thing might have a power to act, or a potency to be acted upon, but until that thing acts or is acted upon, it is merely a disposition or capability of acting or receiving action. *Energia* refers to the acting, or being acted upon, that is beyond merely being capable of acting or being acted upon. See Aristotle. *Metaphysics,* Bk. IX Ch. 6-7. Joe Sachs, translator of my preferred version of Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* has this to say: "[*energia,* translated in Sachs as "being-at-work" is] an ultimate idea, not definable by anything deeper or clearer, but grasped directly from examples, at a glance or by analogy...[*dunamis*,

same. A subject's configuration includes both internal and external configurations. A subject can be spoken of as configured internally, as when its matter or parts are ordered in a certain way, so as to make/constitute the thing itself, or to give rise to some property (be it essential or accidental) within the thing. A subject can also be spoken of as configured externally, as when it is subsumed as a part into a greater unified whole, or to give rise to some relational property between it and another object; in the former sense of external configuration, it is configured by being placed into certain relations to objects other than itself that are also serving as parts. An object's activities include, but are not limited to, configurational states, since the "act of being configured in such a way" counts as an activity (a manifestation of a potency). But activities also include properties that are not obviously configuration/formal, such as motion or the use of causal powers. This is especially likely, given that there are very strong reasons, unable to be covered here, that Aquinas saw one kind of proportionality as participation in or similarity to a divine, exemplary idea of the thing. If this is the case, as Sevier and Doolan suppose, the non-dimensional, non-quantitative properties like activities also come into play under the header of both integrity and proportion.[41]

However, it must be kept in mind that the conditions of integrity, proportion, and clarity are not strict, absolute divisions, and the tripartite account of beauty given by Aquinas should be taken as sketching an overall picture of beauty as a function of an object's goodness, both internal and external, and its fit with the human mind (i.e., clarity). For example, the term "proportion" is likely not to be taken as a single constituent or condition of beauty, but as covering a whole host of conditions. In fact, according to Eco, clarity involves proportion—a proportional fit between observer and observed [42]--along with integrity.[43] And in fact, Aquinas sometimes also gives a binary, rather than triune, definition of beauty in the *Summa Theologica*: "beauty consists in a certain clarity and due proportion."[44]

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translated in Sachs as "potency," is] the innate tendency of anything to be at work in ways characteristic of the kind of thing it is" *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, li, lvii. Simply put: a housebuilder has the potency/*dunamis* to build a house, and when they are engaged in the process or act of building the house, that which is the act or process of building the house is the activity/*energia*. The sense of "actuality" becomes less clear the more one tries to explain it.

[41] "To the extent that we deem Aquinas committed to such a view, as seems to be the case, this is a problem that must be addressed. However, it is possible that such events or character traits may turn out also to have a kind of proportion to the divine ideas…" Op. cit. Sevier, 218.

[42] Eco, op. cit. 85. Sevier follows this interpretation, and recognizes it in Eco. Sevier, op. cit., 210-214.
[43] Likewise, integrity, or perfection, can be understood as involving multiple kinds of proportion. For instance, proportion as an agreement between a thing and itself (what it is or is supposed to be), i.e. agreement between a thing and its function. Eco, op. cit., 88. More narrowly, agreement between the configuration of a being and its ideal configuration.

[44] *Summa Theologicae* ST II.II.180.2-3.

Aquinas on the Subjectivity of Aesthetics (Clarity)

While the "objective" aspects of being beautiful are just the moral (i.e., good or valuable) properties of objects, Aquinas also makes subjectivity a necessary part of being beautiful. The last aspect of beauty, "clarity," is not simply a primary quality of objects, but secondary. "Clarity" appears to be the ability of the object to trigger an awareness of its goodness upon sensory experience, and involves both the configurational and normative properties of an object--those properties that constitute or are sufficient for its goodness and those that "make the observer aware" of its goodness (i.e. those that trigger the disposition in the observer to form certain moral sentiments or judgements about the object).[45]

This is evident from how Aquinas links clarity and color: bright colors are attractive, they pull us in, grab our attention, and help us begin the process of contemplating the object. Color helps us begin to see the inherent attractiveness, goodness, or value of the colorful object—the moral preconditions and grounds of beauty. This reading is further reinforced by the fact that, in the *Sentences,* Aquinas says that beauty requires proportion and "splendor" (Lat. *splendore*), without mentioning clarity; splendor seems to function much like clarity, in that it means something like radiance, an emitting or manifesting of spiritual or corporeal light, suggesting an outward shining of the true or good from within.[46]

All in all, Aquinas' account of beauty states that beauty consists in the

[45] Eco, op. cit., 191. De Haan agrees with Eco, writing: "Claritas signifies the intelligibility and beauty that all forms broadcast into the world; this is an intelligibility and beauty that the human person is naturally oriented towards." D. De Haan, "Beauty and Aesthetic Perception in Thomas Aquinas," in *Beauty and the Good: Recovering the Classical Tradition from Plato to Duns Scotus*, A. Ramos (ed.) (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019). Caponi has a slightly different read on claritas, understanding it to refer to the intelligible light of God. However, the result is the same: Caponi reads claritas as referring to the way in which a particular creature manifests the divine light of God, how the creature takes the source of light and projects it, as a prism, into a new, distinct color. That is, the form of the creature--the particular being of the creature--is an alteration of the Being of God, who is Being is general. Form is, per Caponi, the way the intellect apprehends the creature, and so claritas has to do, ultimately, with the way the creature manifests to the knower. Claritas, as a condition of beauty, seems to mean that the beautiful object manifests the Goodness and Being of God through its form, and so we can see the divine Goodness and Beauty in the creature. It is a poetic term, and not a strict analytical concept. See Francis J. Caponi, "Ontoluminescence: Bright God and Brilliant Creatures in Thomas Aquinas", *The Institute for Sacred Architecture* 31 (Spring 2017).

[46] "The term "splendor" applies to the manifestation of light in corporeal as well as spiritual things. When applied to spiritual things, splendor refers to the notion of manifestation and not the notion of light. Light is a visible quality whose splendor in a body causes the manifestation in vision. If we know something to be luminous, we know it as true and as the cause of the manifestation of truth in the senses and intellect. Truth is completed by intellect, which reflecting on its act, not only knows the act, but also its proportion to the thing." "In later texts, Thomas suggests that clarity includes certain evidence, according to which something becomes visible and manifest in its splendor." Ivanov, op. cit.

possession of three more fundamental properties: (a) goodness (i.e. perfection that is worthy of desire),[47] which itself arises in part from (b) a properly ordered configurational state (one that is in some degree perfect, proportional and consonant), and (c) clarity/splendor, i.e. the subject being such that it would cause a properly disposed observer to judge that it is good, or to form a sentiment of (something like) appreciation or adoration towards it.

Conclusions about Medieval Aesthetics and Beauty as Aesthetic Value in General

I must note again that reading those like Augustine and Aquinas as giving *constitutive* theories of *particular cases* of beauty is wrongheaded. Proportion in Aquinas, for instance, cannot be taken as limited to symmetry, pretty harmony, or a certain ratio of measurements. Instead, proportion is simply a way of expressing a "fit" between the parts and the whole, the moral perfection of the object.[48] And so, even on Aquinas' definition, a work of modern, conceptual art might have just as much proportion as a classical sculpture. It is a matter of fit to function, or fit to meaning, not merely a material structuring. For every being, even those we take to be grotesque, asymmetrical and "lumpy," like the grub of a hercules beetle, have proportion. Their parts fit their purpose, their nature and very act of being. It is best, then, not to read those like Augustine and Aquinas as simply identifying the conditions for a particular aesthetic property called "beauty," but as meditating on the general nature of aesthetic value: that value shared by both natural beings and human artifacts. Beauty is not prettiness or pleasurableness, for such authors, but the broadest notion of aesthetic value itself. One more thing: if beauty is ultimately identical with God, who is Himself unknowable and indefinable, then the ultimate metaphysical essence of beauty and moral goodness will be likewise ineffable. This suggests strongly against reading medieval authors, especially mystics, as obsessed with giving constitutive definitions, but as describing how the ineffable manifests itself in experience as beauty.

Stolnitz, writing at the height of our modernist rejection of beauty (1961), notes that modern aesthetics seeks a general account of aesthetic value, and that the 'old fashioned' concept of beauty was displaced precisely because it

[47] "The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable." And later, "But goodness signifies perfection which is desirable." *Summa Theologica* P1.Q5.A1. What Aquinas seems to be saying is that goodness predicates ("adds") desirability (worthiness of desire) to the notion of perfection, which appears to be the fittingness of a subject's configuration and activities towards some end. Perhaps we should say that not all perfection is desirable (worthy of desire), due to the fact that some ends are evil, and so, even if something is perfected in relation to its end, it is not good. Goodness adds to the notion of perfection worthiness of desire, so that the perfection is fittingness towards a *worthy* end.

[48] Proportion is twofold. In one sense it means a certain relation of one quantity to another, according as double, treble and equal are species of proportion. In another sense every relation of one thing to another is called proportion. And in this sense there can be a proportion of the creature to God, inasmuch as it is related to Him as the effect of its cause, and as potentiality to its act; and in this way the created intellect can be proportioned to know God. *Summa Theologica* I.12.).

was only one aesthetic value among many, not 'aesthetic value' itself.[49] Danto has also persuasively summarized the avant garde as rebelling against beauty in the *particular* sense. But as others note, and as is clear from reading the ancient and medieval sources, beauty was not always spoken of as a narrow aesthetic value, but in the transcendental sense. Beauty (or the words we might translate as beauty: Gk. *kalos*, Lat. *pulchritudo*) was not, as we now take it, understood as a narrow, particular kind of aesthetic property, that kind of 'pretty' aesthetic success that merits a quiet, restful or even elegantly sorrowful response. Rather, beauty was aesthetic success itself, broadly construed so as to cover nature and the arts. It was, for key medieval thinkers, bound up with goodness, with the divine, ultimate source of being and order in all things. Beauty was able to be both the goodness and splendor of the God-man tortured to death in crucifixion, ugly and repulsive, and the soft attractiveness of the delicate flower: general, transcendent, allowing for many and varied expressions. Because beauty was convertible with goodness, and goodness a transcendental present in every creature and aspect of creation, beauty was not a particular aesthetic virtue, but general aesthetic success. Even Hegel, early in the 19th c., was still aware of this general sense of beauty as aesthetic value.[50] How this change in our use of the term "beauty" happened is beyond me. We, looking back from a totally different paradigm, with a bad habit for dissembling objects and experiences into parts, and taxonomizing those parts *ad infinitum*, misread and distort the older sense of beauty as a restrictive and outdated concept. in reality, there can be nothing restrictive about such a general concept of beauty that is not, as we will see, already restricted by our concept of the good.

With all this in mind, I turn now to show how we might reclaim and defend this way of thinking about beauty.

A Buck-Passing Account of Beauty

Again, the notion of beauty I wish to defend is as follows: beauty is the manifestation of the good to the mind through the senses, or the incarnation of the good in the objects of sense. [51] But given that "the good" and its related

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[49] Jerome Stolnitz, "Beauty: Some Stages in the History of an Idea," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22(1961): 185-204.

[50] Even Hegel uses "beauty" not to denote a particular aesthetic perception or property, but in the general sense, as aesthetic success itself, clearly distinguishing it from a particular feeling or sense of beauty. G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 33. Further, according to Hegel, some of his contemporaries (A.L. Hirt and J.W. Goethe) constructed general theories of beauty that likewise presumed beauty to be aesthetic success in general. Ibid., 17-20.

[51] Note that Lopes' view of art has also been called a "buck passing" account, but for entirely different reasons. Lopes thinks that, in order to understand what art really is, we can only define each individual art form/medium. That is, we pass the responsibility of understanding from general theories unifying all of the various arts, to particular theories about each art form. This has

concepts, like value and duty, are somewhat problematic, I propose analyzing all moral, evaluative concepts in terms of normative "reasons-to-respond," along the lines of T.M. Scanlon and Derek Parift.[52] There are two kinds of theories regarding the nature of normative reasons: internalism and externalism. Internal reasons depend on or receive their normative authority from the evaluative states (preferences, willed goals, desires) of moral agents, or the nature of the rational faculties within moral agents (rationally inescapable imperatives or regulative principles, as in Kantian internalism).

External reasons, on the other hand, do not depend on, nor do they draw their normative authority from, sources internal to human moral agents. "Scanlonian buck-passing," as I call it, is an externalist theory of reasons. The metaphysica status and grounds of truths about what reasons we have seems to differ between buck-passers, but that's beyond the scope of this paper. What is necessary for us is that such an account takes "reasons" to be "out there," in some sense, independent of any individual, reason-having agents. On such a view, rationality is a matter of conforming your subjectivity to 'reasons,' and those reasons are not produced by a 'rational' faculty within the agent.

The interesting part of the buck-passing account, however, is its analysis of moral language: talking about normative properties is really just to speak of reasons-relations or facts about normative reasons, so that "goodness" and "value" are just ways of referencing (or are at least easily substituted for) what we have reasons to pursue, love and evaluate positively. All moral or broadly normative properties boil down to fancy ways of describing what reasons we have.

Further, as on Parfit's view, I take reasons to be 'object-given,' and objects as 'reason-giving.'[53] Object-given reasons are reasons agents have to act in relation to some object, where the object is itself the *grounds* of the reason and source of normative authority. The object itself (or some relevant feature of the object) is *why* the agent has a normative reason to act--the object sufficiently explains our having the reasons we have, and does not only take its authority from the agent. Such an account is obviously externalistic, though some

nothing to do with my account. See James O. Young, "The Buck Passing Theory of Art", *Symposion,* 3,4 (2016): 421-433.

[52] T.M. Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons* (Oxford University Press, 2016) and D. Parfit, "Rationality and Reasons. In Exploring Practical Philosophy, by Egonsson in Josefsson, Petersson, and Rønnow-Rasmussen (eds.), *Exploring Practical Philosophy* (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2001).

[53] When objects are not themselves sources of reasons, though we still have reasons to respond to them, I sometimes refer to them as "reason-supervened-on" objects.

internalists have tried to make sense of object-given reasons.[54]

Beauty as Reasonableness Incarnate in Objects of Experience

Beauty is reason-giving-ness manifested in experience, or perhaps reason-giving-ness incarnate in experience.[55] Certain configurations (internal and external) and activities of subjects are worthy of positively or negatively valenced responses from an observer; that is, they provide an observer with non-instrumental reasons to respond to the subject in positive or negative ways.[56] These reason-giving properties and subjects, when encountered in experience, trigger a disposition to form certain normative judgements or sentiments towards the subject. I suggest that beauty is just an object giving us non-instrumental reasons to positively evaluate it for its own sake, while also having the power to trigger our awareness of those reasons.

An Account of Aesthetic Judgement

I take it that moral and aesthetic sentiments often (but not always, as I detail below in the cases of the spider and grub) come prior to aesthetic judgements, and that aesthetic experience and judgement are distinct, though hard to finely divide. Aesthetic experience is a sentimental response, and aesthetic judgement is a cognitive response (ordinarily to the sentimental response itself). Positively valenced sentiments may be sentiments of love, appreciation, respect, or awe. Negatively valenced sentiments may be those like disgust, anger, irritation, or hatred.

In response to or on the basis of these sentiments, we form further judgements, again either positive or negative. These judgements are evaluations of the responses we find in ourselves or others. Positive judgements may be of forms like "x is good," "x is valuable," "x is beautiful." The thrust of my view is that to *judge* "x is beautiful" is just to judge both that x *itself* (or something about x) has triggered a positive sentimental response and/or that x *itself* is worthy of (provides observers reasons to form) this positive response. That is, to judge "x is beautiful" is to judge that x triggered a positive response, and/or that there are *object-given*, non-instrumental reasons to have such a response. We may then point to features of x that we feel are backed by or provide these reasons to respond, but this is distinct

[54] A solid attempt has been made in Pasternack, Lawrence. "Intrinsic Value and Sentimentalism," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 24 (2008): 141-151.

[55] I take this talk of incarnation or 'embodiment' from Danto, and view the definition of beauty given here as a way of unifying the rational and sensory under 'aesthetic value.' "What we must do in order to accept [Hegel's insights into the end of art] is to recognize the way art can, indeed must, be rational and sensuous at once." Arthur C. Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art*. (LaSalle IL: Open Court Publishing, 2003), 94.

[56] I take this talk of incarnation or 'embodiment' from Danto, and view the definition of beauty given here as a way of unifying the rational and sensory under "aesthetic value. "What we must do in order to accept [Hegel's insights into the end of art] is to recognize the way art can, indeed must, be rational and sensuous at once." Ibid, 94.

from the judgment of beauty; rather, it is an explanation for *why* we were given to form the positive response in the first place. That is, if we first form a positive sentiment, and then move to a positive judgement, it is an additional, distinct step to look for the features of x that triggered the sentiment to arise in the first place, and which are reason-providing. After reaching a purely descriptive conclusion (explanation) regarding the properties of x that triggered our response, then, if we can trust our sentimental dispositions, we may conclude that the features that triggered our response were reason-giving.

Overall, my epistemology of beauty judgments is as follows: we encounter a subject with a property that is worthy of (we have reason to) love, admire, etc. (whether this property is a static property or an activity does not matter). This response-worthy property of the subject is such that it appeals to our faculties--encounters with this configuration or activity triggers our dispositions to form positive sentiments towards it. A sensory encounter with that-which-we-have-reasons-to-respond-positively-to triggers the formation of a positive sentiment, let us say *love.* We find ourselves with a positive sentiment towards the object. On the basis of this sentiment, and perhaps also on a belief in the reliability of our dispositions, we judge that there is *something* about the object that merits such a response (that we are "right" in responding the way we are tempted to), even if we cannot identify exactly what it is--this is a judgement that "x is beautiful." (The judgement "x is beautiful" is thus cognitively minimal, with little predicated of an object besides it having *something* about it that merits or demands this response that we are now having.) After this, we may seek to find what explains the rightness of our response, or those features of the object that are evoking (triggering) such a strong, positive sentiment. But these further judgements will regard the particular features of the object we have reason to respond to, and why our dispositions are sensitive to them; they will be explanations for the truth of "x is beautiful," and not the judgement of beauty itself.

This is similar to the process of forming moral judgements on the basis of moral intuitions proposed by Wedgewood:[57] we become aware of some subject, it triggers a rational sensitivity (a sensitivity to reasons) to form a positively or negatively valenced sentiment,[58] and the sentiment is formed. We test this sentiment through continued contemplation of the subject and similar subjects, in order to verify if the sentiment is regularly triggered by the subject. If the sentiment forms regularly, and under similar conditions, then we have some reason to suspect that the sentiment is indeed the product of a moral disposition, and not a mere fluke. We assume, or establish, that our moral dispositions are likely to be reliable. That is, we assume that our

[57] Katri Käsper, Katri, "Ralph Wedgwood, The Nature of Normativity", *Studia Philosophica Estonica.*, 2008, Ch. 10.

[58] What these sentiments amount to, and what their neurological/biological bases are, is a separate question.

sentimental dispositions "track" value and reasonableness.[59] On the basis of this sentiment, and the (hopefully) justified judgement that our dispositions are reliable (that we are, in fact, sensitive to what we have reasons to respond to), we form a judgement attributing a moral property to the subject.

These moral judgements and properties are just ways of asserting that there is *something* about the subject making it rational/irrational to respond positively/negatively to it. This judgement *does not specify* what the reason-giving attribute of the subject is (which attributes of the subject reasons supervene on or are grounded in). Again, this further judgement states that the sentiment was appropriate, or that it was the correct response, or perhaps that the sentiment indicates the presence of *something* about the subject "making" the response appropriate (providing us with reasons). Afterwards, the task of ethical theory is to seek explanations for these reason-giving attributes, inferring from our particular moral responses and subsequent judgements to a general account of (a 'moral law' or metaethical theory about) which stimuli triggered our moral sentiments and why. In other words, we have sensitivities to reason-giving subjects, prompting sentimental responses, which in turn prompt or are the basis upon which we form non-specific normative judgements. We then seek our explanations for the truth of these judgements, and form further general ethical judgements or hypotheses specifying the properties or subjects that ground or are supervened on by reasons.

There are any number of things we might find valuable in objects of experience, or even about the experiences themselves, and equally many different emotional or psychological states following upon experience. There are, then, many different kinds of aesthetic goals, values and experiences. But in our haste to make all sorts of fine, aesthetic distinctions, we forget what all aesthetic experiences have in common: the appearance of the good--or 'reasonableness'--to the mind through the senses.

Thus beauty, on this account, is a normative property. For anything that is truly beautiful is something that we have normative reasons to respond to with love and appreciation. The normativity of beauty derives from the reason-giving or reason-backed internal configurations and activities of objects. As such, the **normative aspect of beauty** is just goodness or intrinsic value. The **subjective aspect** of beauty is simply that the object is a good "fit" with our perceptual and evaluative dispositions, and is given to triggering them. This subjective aspect is ever shifting, because human dispositions are incredibly plastic; and so, in my view, what is beautiful changes all the time,

[59] I am immensely grateful for some very stimulating discussions with Sandra Shapshay at the 2023 American Society for Aesthetics in Santa Fe, NM. She put the core of our similar views perfectly: insofar as we agree, we take the "sentiments to track value," and to be the "primary means of epistemic access to intrinsic value."

varying with culture, though the moral value of those beautiful things remain constant.

The Convertibility of Beauty and Goodness

Beauty is thus, in a sense, *convertible* with goodness. The convertibility thesis is ancient, and has been developed in varying degrees of detail by medieval philosopher-theologians.[60] It is, roughly, to say that the transcendentals--including goodness and beauty--are "one in reality," despite being distinct properties or corresponding to distinct concepts. On my account, beauty and goodness reference the same normative realities, the reason-giving properties or aspects of subjects. To explain beauty, we need not posit any additional *normative* properties or realities beyond those which constitute goodness or moral value. There need not be any special realm or set of truths about aesthetic value or criteria in order to explain the normativity or importance of beauty. Yet beauty involves more than goodness, since it necessarily references a sensitivity-triggering relationship between the beautiful object and observer.

What, then, is the difference between ethics and aesthetics? What, then, is the difference between ethics and aesthetics? A few things follow regarding aesthetics in general. Aesthetics (insofar as it relates to the general conception of beauty) and ethics are two branches of a single normative study. The difference between them lies in the subjective component of beauty--a beautiful object is just a good object (an object that we have reason to love), but a good object that, in virtue of how it is configured, appeals to the sense faculties and dispositions of an observer. So the study of aesthetics, in so far as it concerns itself with beauty, involves both the metaethical study of normative properties and the study of techniques for how to appeal to/trigger the dispositions of observers. An artwork can fail just by being a poor fit with human sensory faculties; aesthetic standards are not merely moral standards, but also standards regarding compatibility or "fit" with human perception.

Further, we may be able to recognize many different kinds of beauty, based on the experiential component of beauty. The normative component of beauty is just intrinsic value, but the value of an object may manifest itself to the senses in many different ways, and produce many different kinds of feelings, responses, "vibes." Thus, aesthetics is not merely ethics, but important in its own right as a discipline describing the different kinds of beauty. Aesthetics is the union of ethics, psychology and biology. Far from being reductionist about aesthetics, all my account does is offer a general definition of beauty of the broadest sort; really, what I mean by "beauty" is just "aesthetic value," or even "aesthetic success," but there are certainly many different kinds of value

[60] Stump and Kretzmann, op. cit.

and success.[61] Art itself may not only be considered with aesthetic success, but other kinds of success and value.[62]

Beauty and Instrumental/External Value

But, one might ask, isn't the value of an artwork also a function of its external features? An artwork is better for being a successful tool to convey ideas, moral insights, or for having the power to console or delight. But if we've defined beauty (aesthetic value) as stemming from the object itself, such that our reasons to value the object arise from the object itself, how can we say that the value of an artwork also involves external relations? Wouldn't this paradigm, if adopted, prevent us from considering a whole range of artistic values (those that are somehow external to the artwork itself)? No: my account does not claim that the *only* value or criteria of art is intrinsic value (reason-givingness). It may simply be that the instrumental or external 'value' of an object enhances its 'baseline,' inherent value. An artwork can become even greater, even more splendid, given its extrinsic/instrumental value, i.e. because of its external relations. It can become more valuable (give us even more reasons to value/care about it) by being a useful tool, a tool for expressing oneself, conveying an idea, teaching us something about ourselves, enhancing the beauty of its environment, etc. These would not, on this definition of beauty, be contributing to the thing's beauty, as beauty is only concerned with the object itself and its qualities and activities. However, it would be increasing the value, preciousness, and worthiness of the artwork.

Epistemic Problems with this Account

The most troublesome aspect of this sort of sentiment or intuition based theory is the supposition that human beings are emotionally or intuitively sensitive to that which we have reason to respond to. For we must not only have a sensitivity to (disposition to be triggered by) that-which-provides-reasons, but our sensitivity must also include a disposition to respond in such a way that the valences of our responses 'match' the reasons it provides. Reliability requires that human moral sensibilities be sensitive to that which we have reason to respond positively or negatively to, *and* have a disposition to respond *positively* to that which we have reason to respond positively to, and *negatively* to that which we have reason to respond negatively to. This sort of

[61] Danto notes something similar, dividing aesthetic beauty (a particular aesthetic property) from artistic beauty (which is synonymous with "artistic value") Danto, op. cit 94.. However, I find it misleading to make the cut here: artistic value, on my account, is just moral value, or *reasonableness,* and thus my concept of general or transcendent beauty is both the beauty of nature and art.

[62] I do not wish to imply that art is necessarily linked with beauty. As Speer points out, the tight link between art and beauty is often projected by modern philosophers and art historians onto the past. Speer, op. cit. Art can have other purposes, and thus "artistic success" is not necessarily the same as "beauty" or "aesthetic success."

sensitivity is not a mere disposition to respond (in just any way) to reason-giving or reason-supervened-on subjects, but to respond *proportionally to* them. Why are we set up in such a way? As proponents of the evolutionary debunking argument(s) put it,[63] why would our evolutionary history result in the ability of our sentiments and dispositions to 'track' reasons?[64] In the case of beauty, why are our sensory faculties set up to be both *sensitive* and *proportionally sensitive* to reason-providing subjects as they appear in sensory experience?

There is not nearly enough space to discuss these issues here, though a few things of import should be noted. First, this account may at first appear to be a naive drawing out of intuitions or sentiments and basing our beliefs on them in a straightforward way. Of course, this would result in too many problems to even be taken seriously. Elsewhere, I have described my view of moral judgements and paradigms, much in line with Wedgwood's, as an organic process of "calibration," a sort of extended reflective equilibrium in which our dispositions and intuitions are only one part. Divine revelation, logical rules (especially of consistency), and other kinds of knowledge are all "calibrating" factors in this process. As such, the realist who relies on our intuitions and sentimental dispositions need not argue that any one sensitivity or faculty is totally reliable or "truth-tracking." Their reliability really only needs to secure their usefulness as one 'input' in a complex process of reflective calibration, balancing, and refinement. Through the various 'inputs' into the functional process of aesthetic and moral deliberation, we construct our judgements. This fits well with Arnold Isenberg's view of aesthetic deliberation and argument as a process of trying to change how we "see" an artwork, not in arguing from general, *a priori* principles.[65] We work out aesthetic disputes, like moral disputes, by focusing our opponent's mind upon the subject in question, viewing it from many different vantage points, conceiving of it under various concepts, with the hope that their dispositions to appreciate will be triggered as ours were. Otherwise, as Isenberg notes, we would have to rely on general principles of what makes an artwork valuable, beautiful, etc. to do the work. Such a reliance on general aesthetic and moral principles is not only philosophically problematic, but strikes me as overly artificial. It is

[63] There are many variants of evolutionary debunking arguments in the literature. Wielenberg identifies at least five. Eric Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics,*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 146-164. Note that EDAs do *nothing* to undermine my externalist analysis of moral concepts, but rather raise problems for postulating that claims utilizing these externalist concepts can be true by correspondence to extramental/external reality/realities. For an overview of EDAs, see also: Guy Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments", *Noûs* 45 (2011): 103-125.

[64] Sharon Street states that evolutionary processes have shaped the *content* of our moral beliefs Sharon Street. "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value", *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 127: (2006): 109-66. Justin Horn argues along the same lines. Justin Horn, "Evolution and the Epistemological Challenge to Moral Realism", in The *Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*, Michael Ruse and Robert Richards (eds.), (Cambridge : Cambridge, University Press, 2017), 114-128.

[65] Arnold Isenberg, "Critical Communication," *Philosophical Review* 58.4 (1949): 330-344.

by playing with all the various inputs, including sense, that we come to our aesthetic and moral views.

Second, if Beauty and Goodness (Reasons/Reasonableness) are convertible with and strongly supervene on Being and Life, then it may be that evolutionary processes would select for dispositions that favor Beauty and Goodness indirectly by selecting for sentiments that would cause us to value life and life-giving things. Love of functionality, cooperation, cleanliness, and various types of order may fall into this. Of course, this only goes so far: evolutionary processes can also inculcate dispositions to find the harmless harmful, and even the beautiful as ugly. But, again, our evolved dispositions need not be totally reliable, but only reliable enough to function as one input in our extended reflective processes. Our dispositions are highly plastic, and can be overcome through a variety of means. But insofar as our biological history has given living beings a love of life, health and being itself, for both the individual and the group, it has provided us with a strong tendency to love the Good and Beautiful.

Third, these issues for my aesthetic account generalize to all normative intuitions: most of what can be said about the troublesome nature of aesthetic judgement can be said of moral judgment in general.[66] If Nelson Goodman is right, this process of reflective calibration and the drawing out of intuitions may be the best way to understand how we "discover" the correct (normative) logical principles, especially in inductive logic.[67] I take it as a strength of my view that it would unify aesthetic with moral and logical belief-formation, subsuming it under a process of reflective equilibrium that makes room for the sentiments as genuine motivators of belief, without giving them ultimate authority or making them the ultimate grounds of normativity.

How Does Aesthetic Experience Differ from Moral Experience?

But if beauty is just a response to a cluster of morally valuable properties (configurations, activities, and their giving reasons to positively respond), then why would we expect experiences of beauty to be different from general moral experience? Yet, it is supposed, that is what we find: experiences of beauty *feel* much different from ordinary moral experience. Doesn't this indicate that beauty is distinct, in some substantial way, from morality? But if moral properties and claims reduce to or are substitutable with reasons-claims, and since my account postulates that the property of beauty is nothing more than those properties of objects that are worthy of triggering the senses to form positive responses, then how do moral claims and experiences differ

[66] Christopher Mole, "Real Objective Beauty", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 56 (2016): 367-381.

[67] See Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). For a summary of Goodman's views, see: Norman Daniels, "Reflective Equilibrium", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/reflective-equilibrium/>.

from claims about and experiences of beauty?

First, I wish to remain flexible in my language. As I stated above, we can use "aesthetic experience" or "beauty" to refer to many different sorts of things. We might use "beauty" to refer to the "beautiful internal qualities" that are necessary preconditions for the experience of beauty (in which case beauty would just be equivalent to intrinsically morally valuable properties--they are properties which give us reasons to love them). We can also use "beauty" to refer to the counterfactual truth that an object with these "beautiful internal properties" would trigger positive responses when apprehended in experience precisely because those beautiful internal properties shine through in experience. "Beauty" can also refer to the experience of delighting in certain internal qualities itself, or even to the relation between the delightful object and delighted. These are all very different sorts of things, and we have to be careful to distinguish between them.

Let us focus on the experience of beauty, and see how it differs from the experiences of moral sentiment and ethical deliberation/judgement. Hopefully this will clarify that my account allows for clear divisions between these different kinds of evaluative judgements and responses.

It seems to me that we typically think of moral experience and judgement as characterized by ethical deliberation, reasoning, or conviction. We often regard moral judgement as the adoption of general moral principles or resolutions of the will after conscious reflection, typically contemplation on the consequences or meaning of our actions. Surely there is some truth in this. However, what provides the material for these deliberative and reflective moral experiences and processes are simpler, more primal moral responses, as I described above. In my simplest and most clear moral judgements, I find no major phenomenological difference between the direct apprehension of the moral worth of some subject and its beauty, only a difference in what triggers or forms the basis of those responses. Often, but not always, the differences between moral and aesthetic experience lie in the faculties that stimuli trigger, and the sorts of responses they trigger. An experience of beauty involves the triggering of positive responses specifically through the sensory faculties and not through conscious chains of inference or any consciously held *a priori* propositions or imperatives. The *sound* of birds, the *colors* of a sunset, the *sight* of Aspen leaves spinning in the wind--these trigger a positive sentiment upon which a conscious judgement of reasonableness or worthiness is later based. The apprehension of beauty is very direct and not mediated through reasoning, at least at the conscious level. We see a beautiful painting and often, prior to any complex chain of reasoning, *feel* immediate positivity towards it, just on sensory observation. It is a delightful, psychologically unique experience to apprehend that which is worthy of love and *feel* love towards it, and to do so without being caught up in distracting lines of reasoning. Perhaps there are complex patterns of reasoning underlying our experience of apprehending the object, but the aesthetic experience itself is not

identical to those reasonings or even necessarily consciously wrapped up with them, even if they casually and logically depend on them.

This is similar to how I would characterize my primal moral responses: the *destruction* constituting a violent act or the *love* manifested in a forgiving embrace strike with similar, unreflective forcefulness, and my general moral commitments are based upon these experiences. (This is not to say that previous conscious reflection has no effect on later responses, only that the responses are not themselves arrived at via inference or deliberation.) Thus, the phenomenology of ethical/moral deliberation and judgement-formation are, since they are characterized by inferential and weighing processes, are quite different from aesthetic experience (though not very different from aesthetic judgement and deliberation).

Still, primal moral experiences and responses are pretty much identical to aesthetic experiences on my account. Perhaps there are primal moral responses that are not triggered by empirical apprehension of some action or object. We might reflect on abstract/general moral principles and find that they induce good feelings in us (though I am a bit suspicious of the idea that we can have sentimental responses without some sort of imagining of its real-world consequences or implications). This could be a potential dividing line between aesthetic and moral experience: moral experience is a broad evaluative-sentimental response to any subject, and aesthetic experience is a specific kind of moral experience, a response to a subject's phenomenological manifestation and properties. Overall, I see no need, upon inspecting the character of my primal moral and aesthetic experiences, to make a fundamental division between them (other than in their subject matter or triggers).

In short, I suggest that the aesthetic is a subcategory of the moral/ethical. The moral/ethical involves any kind of normative evaluation, and includes both judgement and sentiment. The aesthetic further subdivides normative judgement and sentiment by pertaining only to the inherent value or worthiness of the sensory and material elements of a subject (including the ways in which the material can constitute an incarnation or embodiment of an immaterial/abstract/conceptual principle).

> All in all, I am supposing that an experience of beauty is a kind of moral experience, resulting from a fit between the reason-giving aspects of a subject's phenomenal qualities, our sensitivities, and the sentiment formed. A further sense of "rightness" or, as Kant would say, "universality," often follows from the experience. The sentimental response leaves us prone to judge that "this way I am responding is correct--I have reasons to respond this way, and so do others." Put another, perhaps more accurate way: on this buck-passing account, our most intuitive, 'primal' moral experiences and judgements are one

with our aesthetic experiences and judgements.

Conclusion

There are several more implications of this analysis of beauty that cannot be covered here, but will be developed in a follow-up paper. Such an analysis is not only consonant with medieval and classical aesthetic sensibilities, but can explain a diverse set of intuitions that I, at least, find within myself. To hint at the explanatory power of the account proposed above, and as a promissory note, I take it that this account can shed light on:

- The interrelation of ethics and aesthetics (method and metaphysics),
- The aesthetic value of the natural world,
- The ability of art to contribute to meaning in life,
- The normativity despite the subjectivity of aesthetics,
- The inherent beauty of even 'ugly' or 'repugnant' subjects,
- The unity of empirical and conceptual (theoretical) beauty,
- The fact that we can find aesthetic value, to some degree, even in "bad" art; i.e. that artistic success and value comes in degrees.

But I content myself, in closing, with pointing out that, if we could establish the Scanlonian type buck-passing accounts of moral language and reasons as a viable alternative to internalist theories of ethics, we would only be a step away from a full recovery of the medieval aesthetic mindset.